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SUBJECT: Prime Minister and Two Cabinet Ministers Resign To Run for
Legislative Office

¶1. (U) On September 23, President Tandja accepted the resignation of three key cabinet members during a ceremony at the Prime Minister's Office. Prime Minister Seini Oumarou, Minister of Communications and Government Spokesperson Mohamed Ben Omar, and Minister of Religious Affairs and Humanitarian Assistance Issaka Labo resigned to become eligible to run in the October 20 National Assembly elections. President Tandja publicly awarded them National Medals of Merit, and lauded them for "serving with the highest honor." The GON announced that Minister of Interior Albade Abouba will serve as interim Prime Minister. (Note: Abouba is reported to be serving as the nominal interim Head of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Humanitarian Assistance. End note.)

¶2. (SBU) Comment: Before the new constitution was adopted on August 4, the position of Prime Minister carried considerable clout. According to Article 59 of the 1999 constitution, "The Prime Minister is the Head of Government. He directs and coordinates government actions. He provides for law enforcement. He may delegate certain powers to ministers." In the new constitution, however, his role is not clearly defined. It states that, "the Prime Minister coordinates government actions" and can only exercise powers delegated by the President. Former PM Oumarou, who is the president of ruling party, Mouvement National pour la Societe de Developpement (MNSD), will likely gain election and serve as majority whip in the National Assembly. This position may be more influential than that of Prime Minister, now largely a ceremonial role. His presence in the National Assembly, along with other ministers, is expected to help President Tandja secure a parliamentary majority and pass key legislation. End comment.

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